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THE STATE OF THE Silk buſineſſe,

As it ſtands before the Grand Committtee of Parliament for TRADE.

AT the time of the laſt Adjournment of this Parliament, a debate was depending in the Grand Committee of the Houſe of Commons for Trade, touching the reformation of the great abuſes in Silk-dying, but by reaſon of the ſaid Adjournment the matter was then left undetermined.

And becauſe it is now likely to be renewed again, leſt perhaps the State of the Queſtion may for the preſent have eſcaped the Memory of any the honourable Members of the ſaid Houſe, leave is humbly prayed to recall the ſame to remembrance: And to adde a word or two by way of Anſwer to ſome Objections made againſt the Expedient propounded by ſome of the Petitioners for Reformation of the ſaid Abuſes.

The Queſtion was firſt ſet on foot by occaſion of a Petition Exhibited to His Majeſty in the name of divers Silk-men, Silk-Dyers, and Silk-Weavers of the City of *London*; and

ſubſcribed by the proper hands of above threeſcore of the Petitioners, who complain therein of the ſaid Abuſes, and humbly propoſe by way of an Expedient moſt proper for the Reforming thereof; That for as much as the ſaid Abuſes conſiſt chiefly in the addition of weight, by ponderous and corrupt Materials uſed in the Dying, which alſo deſtroy the ſubſtance of the Silk, a certain place may be appointed, (where any publick Dye-houſes are kept) unto which all Silk that ſhall be Dyed, may be required to be brought (both as it goes to, and as it returns from Dying) to be examined by the Scale both before and after: and that a Competent Fee might be allowed for the ſatisfying of the paines and defraying the charges of thoſe that ſhould execute the ſaid Examination.

This Petition being referred by His Majeſty to His Council for Trade, then ſitting at Mercers Chappel, to conſider and make report of their opinions. The Company of Dyers of the City of *London* (who conſiſt as well of Cloathing Dyers and Dyers of other Woollen and Linnen Manufactures, as of Silk Dyers) have notice thereof given them by Order of the ſaid Council, to the end that if they had any thing to offer againſt the ſame, they might be heard.

The Dyers hereupon came in, And by a long Paper Exhibited in the nature of an Anſwer to the ſaid Petition, confeſs the ſaid Abuſes (which they aggravate likewiſe with the Epithite of horrid) to be now more then ever practiſed, to the univerſall cheating of the whole Kingdom: And that it is abſolutely neceſſary that they be Reformed. Setting forth alſo the great, but ineffectuall endeavours that had been heretofore uſed both by King *James* and His late Majeſty in that behalf, untill at laſt they all ſetled in the Erecting of a Scale, agreeable to the Petitioners propoſal above mentioned.

But withall they paſſionately object againſt the ſame, as burthenſome and prejudicial to Trade, rather ſorting with the ends of particular perſons, then effective of the Reformation propoſed.

And

And further, pretend to a kind of right of Reforming the ſaid Abuſes themſelves by way of ſearch, grounded upon their Charter of Incorporation.

And the Petitioners in reply, ſhew the utter inſufficiency of a ſearch to effect the Reformation deſired.

Firſt, from the impoſsibility of diſtinguiſhing (by the eye) true dyed from heavy dyed Silk, of which they made an occular demonſtration before the ſaid Council, by a parcell of both ſorts which the Dyers themſelves then preſent could not diſtinguiſh.

Secondly, from the eaſineſſe of concealing it from the diſcovery of the ſtricteſt ſearch.

Thirdly, from the inſupportableneſſe of the trouble and prejudice to Trade that muſt enſue if a ſearch be duely and effectually executed; it being requiſite to be renewed daily, and that in the Shops and Houſes of all Traders in Dyed-Silk, as well as in Dye-houſes.

Fourthly, from the little good the Dyers had ever wrought by their pretended ſearches, under which, either through their connivance or remiſneſs, the Abuſes rather increaſed then were Reformed.

And laſtly, from the unfitneſſe of the Dyers (who are the only perſons who can actually practiſe the ſaid Abuſes) to be entruſted with the Reformation thereof.

And by way of Argument to juſtifie their own propoſals, they further offer,

That the Scale is the only proper Tryer and Examiner of Weight.

That it prevents the deceipt before hand, whereas a ſearch can at beſt but purſue it after it is committed.

That it is not ſubject to the like Evaſion and Eſcape as a ſearch is.

That it obliges the Trader to infinite leſs trouble and loſſe then a ſearch: And of two troubles or loſſes the leſs is to be choſen.

That it hath already been tryed with good Succeſſe, even by many of the Dyers own Confeſsions.

And as to the objection of Male-Adminiſtration, that may be in it (objected by the Dyers) the Peitioners offer by way of Expedient for prevention thereof.

Firſt, that none be employed at the Scale, but ſuch as ſhall have the approbation of the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen.

And ſecondly, that ſevere Lawes may be made againſt all Misdemeanors therein.

And the Council (after many hearings of both parties) were ready for a report; which the Petitioners for the Reformation have good reaſon to think it would have been in favour of their Expedient.

To prevent which, the Dyers found means to delay and drive off the buſineſſe till the meeting of the Parliament, which was then at hand; upon their very firſt ſitting, that they might ſeem to be the firſt Complainers, and zealous of a Reformation, they cunningly clap in a Petition to the Houſe of Commons, in which they ſet forth and exceedingly aggravate the ſaid Abuſes; and pray that they may be armed with ſufficient power to reform the ſame by ſearching, ſeizing, &c.

And afterwards it being by Order of the Houſe of Commons of the 21. of *May* laſt, referred to the Grand Committee for Trade to bring in a Bill to prevent the Abuſes in dying of Silk; the Petitioners firſt above mentioned, humbly offer a Bill by them prepared in that behalf: It being for the Erecting of a Scale for tryal of all Silk as aforeſaid, and ſetling of a Fee for the maintaining of the ſame, which Bill together with the whole buſineſs relating to the matter of Silk-dying, was by the ſaid Grand Committee for Trade, referred to a Sub-committee to conſider and report.

Before this Sub-committee came, ſome few of the Company of Weavers *London*, drawn in as is ſuppoſed by the Dyers, who now

now began to ſuſpect their cauſe, and in the name of the whole Company (which conſiſteth of many thouſands of poor Artificers) pray that all Silk that ſhall be dyed for the Weavers uſe, may be exempted out of the ſaid Bill; for as much as it is contrary to their intereſt, that their Silk ſhould be heavy dyed, and therefore not needful for them to be ſubjected to that trouble and charge.

And the like Addreſſe is made by ſome few of the Silk-Stocking ſellers in the name of the whole, upon like pretended grounds.

But the fallacy of this pretence appearing, for that the greateſt part both of the Weavers and Silk-Stocking Makers are very poor, who for want of ſtock to buy Silk of the Merchant Raw and put it to dying, are forced to buy Silk Ready dyed, and that in ſmall quantities from hand to mouth, either of Silk-men, Silk-dyers, or the richer ſort of their Fellow-Members, whoſe intereſt it is for what they ſell to others to have it heavy dyed, and for that they were the only perſons that appeared in this oppoſition. Beſides that, if an exemption ſhould be admitted of ſome Silk, it might be a colour for all.

The ſaid Sub-committee, after full hearing of all parties by Council on both ſides, do paſſe theſe enſuing Votes, *viz.*

1. That there is abuſe in the dying of all ſorts of Silk, as is ſet forth in the Bill.
2. That the fitteſt way for redreſs of this abuſe, is to entruſt it to Commiſſioners, as is propounded in the Bill.
3. That the beſt way to detect this abuſe, is to try it by the Scale, as is propounded in the Bill.
4. That the Chair-man do report theſe Votes, and the matter of fact, to the grand Committee of Trade.

Which was accordingly reported, and the ſaid grand Committee concurred in the firſt Vote; but before the reſt could be debated, the Parliament was Adjourned, and in this poſture it ſtood till the laſt Meeting.

Since

Since which the Parties above-mentioned, as if they had never been heard before upon the ſame matter, have put in their ſeveral Petitions *de novo* before the grand Committee for Trade, which were read the 13. of *December* laſt, together with a Petition from the Dyers, and a Reſolve made at one of their Courts of Aſſiſtants, ſince this buſineſs was on foot, *viz.* That they will undertake the Reformation of the abuſes above-mentioned, within the City of *London* and 20. Miles compaſs according to their Charter, for the moity of the Forfeitures and Penalties, without any other Impoſition, by the Pound weight to be laid upon Silk.

And the report above-mentioned of the Chair-man of the Sub-Committee aforeſaid, was likewiſe called for and read the ſame time.

But nothing reſolved by reaſon of the ſecond Adjournment of Parliament, which then immediately followed; and in this poſture the buſineſs ſtands at this day.

Now, if it ſhall be thought fit for the grand Committee to reſume the Conſideration of thoſe particulars conteined in the ſaid Petitions, which have been already fully heard and debated by the Sub-Committee: It is humbly prayed that it may be narrowly obſerved, that there is an egregious fallacy in the ſaid Petitions, whereby the promoters endeavour to blind and mislead the Committee.

For although it be true, that it is the real Intereſt of the Artificer, that the Silk he converts into Manufacture himſelf ſhould be light dyed, becauſe it runs the further, and is the more beautiful in the Commodity; and they infer from thence, that no Artificer who buyes his Silk raw, and puts it to dying, and afterwards converts it into Manufacture, and ſells it by meaſure, will cauſe the ſame to be heavy dyed. Yet they conceal from the Committee, That there are but few of the ſaid Artificers that have ſtocks to buy Silk raw of the Merchant, and put it to dying: And that the reſt, which are many thouſands,

are

are poor men, who having little ſtock, are forced to buy their Silk ready dyed, in ſmall quantities from hand to mouth, either of the Silkman, or of the richer ſort of their fellow Members, or elſe of Silk-dyers, who buy great quantities raw, and dye it for their own account, to ſell to others. And it is the Intereſt of all theſe (if unlawful gain may be called an Intereſt) that what they dye or put to dying for ſale to others, ſhould be heavy dyed. And upon examination it will be found, that the onely perſons who appear in oppoſition of the Bill above mentioned are of this ſort; or elſe are ſuch, as being in the Books of ſuch perſons, are drawn in by fear of their Creditors to own the ſaid Petitions; who, if they were free from this fear, would utterly diſclaim them.

And this being made out before the Sub Committee, is to be preſumed to be the very reaſon of that firſt Vote of theirs above mentioned, *viz.* That there is an abuſe in the dying of all ſorts of Silk.

Which being not to be denyed, and a Reformation being agreed upon on all hands to be abſolutely neceſſary; the whole matter which remains, will fall back into this ſingle Queſtion, at which it was before, *viz.*

Whether the Dyers ſearch (which can onely be executed after the dying) or the Expedient of the Bill, which prevents the abuſe before hand, be the moſt proper way of remedy for this abuſe.

To determine which, the Members of the ſaid Committee are humbly prayed to look back upon the Arguments above mentioned on both parts, as they were offered to the Council of Trade, when the matter was depending there.

Onely there remains two things from which the Expedient of the Bill would be cleered.

One is, That it is objected to be a Monopoly; and the other, That the burthen of the Fee will be unſupportable, and the Dyers offer to reform the abuſe without any Impoſition at all to be impoſed upon Silk.

To

To anſwer the firſt it is humbly offered, That it leanes not in the leaſt to the reſtraining of the Trade to the hands of particular perſons, and therefore cannot come within the compaſs of a Monopoly, either at the Common Law, or by the Statute of 21 *Jac.* as the Gentlemen of the long Robe, Members of the Houſe, if conſulted upon the Queſtion, will no doubt reſolve.

And as to the ſecond, if it be conſidered, that by the practice of the abuſe in heavy dying of Silk, the Buyer and Uſer is now cheated at leaſt four, five, ſix or eight ſhillings in every pound weight, beſides the deſtruction of the ſubſtance of the Silk it ſelf: It will appear, that the ſmall Fee of ſix pence in the Pound impoſed for the bearing of the charge of reforming the ſame, will be ſo far from burthening the Subject, that it will on the contrary render the Commodity far cheaper in the end, both to the wearer and worker of the Commodity.

As to the Dyers offer, who frequently themſelves buy raw Silk, and when they have dy'd it, ſell it to ſeveral perſons both in City and Country, backt with the concurrence of thoſe perſons who uſe the ſame deceipt; if nothing had been ſaid touching the inſufficiency of their ſearches in point of Reformation, yet for as much as it is their apparent advantage that the abuſes be continued, and that they are the onely perſons who can actually practiſe the ſame; their offer is altogether ſuſpicious, and therefore to be rejected; there being as little reaſon to truſt the Dyers with this Reformation, as there was heretofore to continue it in the Silk-men; whom His late Majeſty diſ-incorporated, for that it was diſcovered, that under pretence of reforming the ſaid abuſes, by the power of their Charter, they practiſed the ſame the more ſecurely, by a complyance betwixt the Dyers and themſelves.

All which is humbly ſubmitted to the Wiſdom of the Parliament.

FINIS.

MVSEVM BRITANNICVM